



AS

History

7041/1F

Report on the Examination

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General

It was good to find that many centres had reflected on the first AS exam for this unit – and indeed the Lead Assessor’s report – and so many students who were better prepared for the examination. It was clear that many centres had gained much from the experience of last year. Students especially showed much better knowledge of the economic history element of the specification. In the responses to Questions 02 and 03, there was also evidence that students could think effectively across a broad period of history, selecting relevant examples to support a case and providing substantiated individual judgement. There were, of course, some, whose knowledge of material or understanding of developments, were inadequate for the tasks set. Those who, despite some effective revision, still under-performed may have failed to take on board some of the new A-level requirements and it is largely to help such students that the following comments are offered.

Section A

01

Students were required to compare the two extracts to reach a judgement as to which was the more convincing interpretation of the impact of war on Britain by 1812. The key problem was that some students – far less than last year fortunately – did not follow the requirements of this question through problems of technique. A few continued to evaluate the extracts’ provenance and bias as if they were dealing with sources in a depth study paper. Some gave a long contextual overview of the period at the outset without really relating this to the comparative task at hand – students were not penalised for this but it was not really addressing the objective of the question. More failed to give a proper comparison to support their judgement at the end of their answers. Others identified points of similarity which really did not help to support why one extract was more convincing than the other.

However, the most obvious differentiator between student answers to this question lay in the ability to identify and address the overall argument raised by each extract. Far too many adopted a line-by-line approach, which neither showed any overall understanding, nor kept the answer focused on the question demands. Indeed, this was often the refuge of less able students who simply gave a paraphrased commentary on the extract with very little contextual knowledge. For the benefit of those preparing students for a future examination, it might be worth reiterating the importance of first considering the topic to be addressed (which follows the ‘in relation to...’ in the question) and then assimilating the whole extract before starting to write. Students should be reminded that the key argument of an extract does not necessarily appear in the first line.

One effective strategy employed by students who achieved better marks tended to give an overview of the argument in each extract first, then examine key points in each one, point out differences when dealing with the second extract and finally writing a substantial judgement with the key points of difference with supporting evidence.

On this year’s paper, the first extract argued that the war saw a period of economic growth despite social costs. Therefore, while the extract was generally positive about the influence of war, some students went too far in claiming that it had no balance. Extract B certainly was far more negative about the impact of war with an unqualified but unsupported claim that war did not stimulate innovation. However, there were some small points of balance, such as the opening up of trade with captured French colonies and the very qualified point that the war was more devastating to

France than Britain. Thus, those students who simply argued that Extract B lacked balance oversimplified matters.

More able students examined the claims of each extract with reference to the impact of war – for example, explaining the housing shortage or the stopping of canal building on the devotion of resources and capital to the war rather than house building. Several students believed that governments built houses and canals and that it was they who could not afford the house building. They used own knowledge of the demand for uniforms and armaments as a positive impact of war and the operation of the Berlin and Milan Decrees and the Orders in Council as harmful effects of war. Many students argued that the improvements in the economy cited in A were more long-term results of industrialisation rather than the war which they used to favour Extract B as a more convincing interpretation; others cited the greater balance in Extract A with some clear recognition of the negative social effects of war unlike the more unbalanced argument in Extract B as a reason to view Extract A as the more convincing interpretation.

Some students were simply careless in their reading of the extracts and thus drew false comparisons. For example, students failed to see that there is nothing contradictory in canal investment peaking in the 1790s but canal building stopping in the 1800s. Others also ascribed everything to the impact of war; some students seemed to be claiming that war had the impact of restricting the building of canals because canals tended to freeze over in winter. Napoleon may have been a ‘great man’ but control over the weather was beyond even his powers.

Section B

02

Many students were knowledgeable about Pitt the Younger’s career between 1783 and 1793 and could produce a very long list of his reforms as Prime Minister over this period. The less able students either did not know much about his reforms or gave a narrative of Pitt as Prime Minister and how he secured the post with the assistance of George III or talked about Pitt’s Terror most of which was outside the period of study. However, evidence of the impact or otherwise of his reforms after this period was acceptable as evaluative of his success. Less able students who did focus on reforms either tended to list them with little explanation as to why they were successful or not or lacked any real balance. Most students tended to agree with the claim in the question but better ones did explore balancing points like the long-term failure of the sinking fund, the absence of social reform or his failure to address the rise of political discontent between 1789 and 1793 by further reform for example.

Those students who did know and explain his reforms generally produced more effective answers when they grouped the reforms thematically and took a balanced approach to each theme. This allowed students to develop an argument more easily. Some compared Pitt’s administrative and financial reforms with his inactivity in political or social reforms; a few exonerated Pitt on his political inactivity because of the failure of his bill for parliamentary reform in spite of his efforts.

03

The key to success with this question was to decode its demands which unfortunately some students failed to do. The question was really looking at the origins of the reforms of the 1820s and one possible factor was offered for consideration in the question – the radical agitation after 1812. Unfortunately, the question tended to attract less able students who knew something about post-war radicalism but little more. Consequently, their answers failed to associate these events with any actual reforms and so were very limited in their marks.

Some students pointed to the activities of O’Connell and the Catholic Association with the achievement of Catholic Emancipation as evidence of the effectiveness of the radical movement in achieving reform. As these activities post-dated 1812 and could be considered as part of the radical movement, this was accepted. Other students pointed to reforms which were out of scope as they were not in the 1820s; examples included the 1819 Factory Act, the 1832 Great Reform Act (shunted forward by the hopeful to the late 1820s) and the 1831 Truck Act (not 1820) and these could not be credited. More able students identified actual reforms of the 1820s and often argued that they were in part a response to radical agitation in order either to prevent further agitation by improved law and order (such as the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829) or to increase real wages (by free trade measures) or to address working class grievances directly (like the repeal of the Combinations and the Test and Corporation Acts).

The most able students gained balance most often by claiming that the ‘Liberal Tories’ who replaced the ‘Ultra Tories’ in dominant government positions around 1820 were ideologically committed to reforms and it was their belief in free trade, penal reform and reducing the severity of the penal code due to their liberal principles which led to the changes. These students tended to argue by extension that the absence of reform before 1820 was due to the fear of concessions to radical demands and thus the radical movement served to delay reforms rather than promote them. Others pointed to the concession of Catholic emancipation in Ireland to argue that the radical movement only succeeded in gaining reforms when sufficient pressure was placed on the government; thus, most reforms were not due to the radical movement but the attitudes of government ministers. Some did argue that radical agitation shaped the views of many Tories and thus they took the wind out of the sails of the radical movement when they felt it was safe to do so, often instancing the rapid revision to the repeal of the Combination Act in 1825 to illustrate their sensitivity to possible radical agitation.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.